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Briefing file*

1 March 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Conversation with Chairman John Stennis re Request for
Director's Appearance before the Senate Foreign
Relations Committee

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1. On the Director's instructions, I today met with Chairman Stennis, Senate Armed Services Committee, and told him of the request the Director had received to appear before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Wednesday, 11 March, for a world wrap-up briefing. I explained that we were concerned over a comment by Carl Marcy, Chief of Staff of the Foreign Relations Committee, that the Committee was particularly anxious to hear from the Director regarding CIA supported activities in Laos. I reminded the Chairman of the sensitivity of some of these activities, particularly the introduction into Cambodia of several

[REDACTED] The Chairman said this was a difficult matter, but he was pressed for time and would like to consider it and give me his views a little later in the day.

2. When we met again that afternoon, I showed Senator Stennis the attached excerpt from a letter to Chairman Fulbright from an unidentified member of the Foreign Relations Committee, which Carl Marcy had given us to explain the situation which concerned them. After reading this carefully, Stennis commented that the problem was a difficult one but we must face the fact that "Congress is no longer going to accept on faith" everything it is told by the Executive Branch.

3. I asked the Chairman whether he might take the position that the matters in question fell exclusively, or at least primarily, within the jurisdiction of his Committee and should not be gone into in detail by any other Committee. He said he did not feel in a position to do this, because it would be very difficult to argue that such Agency-supported activities in Southeast Asia were none of the Foreign Relations Committee's business. He added that "we Committee chairmen don't like to get into arguments with each other on jurisdictional matters if we can help it." However,

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Chairman Stennis said if the Director wished to buy time when he does appear before the Foreign Relations Committee he could beg off answering certain questions in order to have an opportunity to review them first with the chairmen of the Agency's parent Committees.

4. Chairman Stennis asked whether we felt that the Cooper-Church amendment or other restrictive amendments to recent appropriations applied to the Agency. I said we had examined this question very carefully and concluded that our present operations were legally justifiable under the amendments in question, but some people might argue that the Agency's special authority was being used to circumvent the spirit, if not the letter, of some of these amendments. I explained that so far

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5. In conclusion, Chairman Stennis said that, all things considered, the handling of questions of this kind with the Foreign Relations Committee could be properly resolved only on the White House level.

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Secretary Rogers told the Committee on January 28 that questions concerning CIA supported activities in Laos should be asked of CIA Director Helms.

The reluctance of the Secretary to discuss all aspects of United States involvement in Laos has been on my mind over the last few weeks as events have developed in that country and the newspapers have headlined stories of the "CIA's 40,000 man secret army" and "CIA military bases." While none of this is new, it has become increasingly obvious to me that a full discussion of United States policy in Laos (or in Indochina, for that matter) cannot be held without including CIA.

A related question that also concerns me is the possibility that United States involvement in Cambodia might be expanded clandestinely through CIA. You will remember that Secretary Rogers also told the Committee on January 28 that he did not think the Cooper-Church limitations in Cambodia applied to CIA. I believe that this is a matter which the Committee should clarify as soon as possible.

Thus, I would hope that the Committee could ask CIA Director Helms to testify, presumably in executive session.